

The Life of a Tree

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There was a tree. It was small. A very small tree with only two leaves. It was proud of its two leaves and showed them to the sun all day long.

“Look at me,” said the little tree, “I have two whole leaves,” and the sun smiled and shone down upon the leaves and made them green.

The little tree grew. It grew, and it grew, and it grew because it was spring time. It sent up a shoot between its two leaves—up, and up, and up the shoot went—though it wasn’t really tall at all—and out grew a leaf to the left (now it had three leaves), and then a leaf to the right (now it had four leaves), and a leaf to the left, and one to the right, and left again and right, and left, and right, until it had one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten whole leaves. Then it stopped. The tree stopped growing.

“That’s enough growing,” said the little tree. “Now I’m going to sunbathe,”—which is what it did, all summer long.

When fall came the nights grew chilly and nippy and cold.

“It’s chilly and nippy and cold,” said the small tree. “But I’ve been sunbathing all summer long and have lots of warm sunshine in my tummy. I shall use some of it up.”

So the tree set its leaves on fire. Oh, how beautifully they burned in all the shades of fire and flame: yellow and orange and red-red-red! They burned and burned until the leaves fell fluttering to the earth.

Now the tree was naked. It was stark, stark, naked; a stick sticking starkly out of the ground.

Winter came. Rain and wind and storms and snowflakes made of ice whirled and danced around him. But the tree was a tree. He knew how to wait in stillness and be patient.

One day the birds began to sing:

*‘Spring has come,
Bright the sun—
Now the time is blessed.*

*Winter's gone,
Sing your song—
All the earth has rested.'*

It was time to grow again. So the tree did. He did and he did and he did. He sent out shoots and grew his roots and sprouted leaves from his budding branches. He bathed. He basked in the sun, and swam in the sun, and lounged and loafed and lay in the sun until it was time to set his leaves on fire once again.

Year after year the tree grew; a wellspring of wonder growing taller and taller till he towered over the forest. People came and sat beneath him. They said things. They said them aloud, or quietly, or in their hearts. Things like: 'Beautiful,' 'Lovely,' and, 'Oh, how I love you!' over and over and over again until the tree was three hundred of year old.

Then the tree stopped growing. He was as big as his kind of big tree could be.

"Ah," said the tree, who was wise from so many years, "my fall is coming. I know it. I feel it in my timbers."

Men came with axes. Chop, chop, chop—they chopped down the tree. He fell with a groan and a crash—the loudest crash there ever was! It echoed off the distant mountains and shook the air.

The men cut up his wood. They made beams for their houses, planks for their floors, chairs to sit on and tables to eat at. They made wooden bowls for cooking and spoons for spooning, toys for their children and beads for necklaces. The rest of the tree was burnt in winter stoves and fires. All winter long the men and their wives and children looked at the flames and wondered. They wondered and wondered at all the light and warmth inside that wood.

And when the fires had died they spread the ashes onto their gardens to help them grow.

And that was the end of the tree.

Except it wasn't.

Oh, no—that tree was too clever! Oh, he was crafty! The very next spring, right where the tree used to be, another teeny-tiny tree was seen to be sprouting. It had two shiny leaves, a left and a right one, and each wore a smile as big as the sun.